

Special Council Meeting/Joint Meeting
Freeport City Council and Walton County Board of County Commissioners
DeFuniak Springs Board Room
August 19, 2013

I. Meeting Called to Order

Commissioner (Chair) Kenneth Pridgen called the special joint meeting of Walton County Commissioners and Freeport City Council members to order on August 19, 2013 at 5:00 p.m.

Members present: (Walton County) Attorney Mark Davis, Assistant County Administrator Dede Hinote, Interim County Administrator Gerry Demers, Commissioners Cindy Meadows, Bill Imfeld, Bill Chapman, Sara Comander and Kenneth Pridgen. (Freeport) Mayor Russ Barley, Council members Janice McLean, Jennifer Laird, Harold Taunton Jr., Ray Jackson, and Elizabeth Brannon, Attorney Clayton Adkinson and City Clerk Robin Haynes

II. Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance

Commissioner Comander made a motion to declare a Local State of Emergency due to recent heavy rains, Commissioner Meadows seconded. There was no council or public discussion, the motion carried 5:0 and resolution #2013-53 was adopted.

Commissioner Comander made a motion to work with Regional Utilities to pump areas flooded on Spotted Dolphin Road to be able to restore power and sewer to the area, Commissioner Meadows seconded. There was no public or council discussion, the motion carried 5:0.

Chairman Pridgen asked the Freeport City Council to discuss the current bay area sewer loan agreement. Mayor Barley opened by stating that customers have not connected to the sewer system in the amount that was originally hoped and as such, all payments to date have been applied to the interest. Mayor Barley requested the Commissioners consider accepting a payment of \$1,000,000.00, remove the interest rate from the balance of the loan and agree to a modified payment plan to pay the loan during the next five to seven years. The Freeport City Council would like to be able to lower some of the connection fees, but need to get the loan situated first. Councilman Jackson requested that instead of making a cash payment of \$1,000,000.00 if the County would consider allowing the City to use that amount of funds to offer free connections for residents, beginning with the waterfront properties of the Baygrove Road area. Commissioner Imfeld felt that would be considered “double-dipping”, both Attorneys Mark Davis and Clayton Adkinson had concerns with waiving all fees for customer connections, when there were already residents that had paid the fees to connect. Discussion continued regarding current costs for sewer connections, the loan agreement, and the current areas included in the franchise agreement. Commissioner Meadows stated that the clean up of the bay was a regional issue and a massive undertaking. The County was hoping to be able to use RESTORE funds towards clean up efforts – but the citizens expected the City to pay the loan money back, and she was in favor of a payment plan. Attorney Adkinson stated that the City was making payments according to the schedule of the loan agreement. Ms. Eleanor Turner stated that mortgage companies will not approve a loan if sewer is available and not connected to the home. The Freeport City Council will discuss sewer

options at their next meeting on August 22, 2013 and the Board of County Commissioners will discuss the options further at their next meeting of August 27, 2013.

Chairman Pridgen opened discussion on the Freeport Fire department. Mayor Barley asked if the County would consider continuing the City's funding for one more year. Commissioner Imfeld said no, the plan was not to continue the annual funding. The County was prepared to provide services for the County residents both east and west of Freeport. Three options were presented that were estimated to cost the County less than the current \$260,000.00 annual payment to Freeport.

- Option 1 – includes a new station east, a new station west for a net cost to the County of (\$40,000.00)
- Option 2 – includes a new station east, a merge with Freeport, and no new station west at this time for a net cost to the County of (\$24,000.00)
- Option 3 – includes a new station east, move the Choctaw Beach station east for a net benefit of approximately \$215,000.00.

Councilmember McLean provided a proposal that would include the City maintaining the area that it currently covers, receiving MSBU funds of approximately \$225,000.00 (with the County rate hike) and the County funding \$75,000.00. The proposal also requests a three to five year inter-local agreement for fire services.

Discussion continued between board members including fire department merger options of maintaining the Freeport logo, the ability of current Freeport firemen to be given first option at open positions, the ability and willingness of the County to move forward and provide fire services to County residents and possible reimbursement and/or credit for Freeport equipment and fire hydrants. Councilwoman Brannon asked for consideration of a potential 5th option – to somehow offset the bay area sewer loan with value of the fire station and equipment if the two fire services were merged.

Janelle Goodwin asked who was going to be responsible for the clean up of the bay. Commissioner Comander again stated that they were hoping for RESTORE funds to assist with that project.

IV. Adjournment

No action was taken. The meeting was adjourned at 6:15 p.m.

ATTEST:

APPROVED:

Russ Barley, Mayor

Robin Haynes, City Clerk

Janice McLean, Council President